

The Whole Enchilada
Strength Worship: Loving God with Your Body
Pastor Jana Swenson, St Mark Lutheran Church, 11 May 2008

One of my favorite experiences as a mom is the greeting I get when I come home from a trip. Those of you who are moms can probably identify with this. When the girls were little, the minute I walked in the door they would drop whatever they were doing and come running toward me screeching "Mommeeeeeee!" Then they would throw their arms around me, squeeze me tight and tell me how much they missed me. Those were moments when I experience the pure unadulterated love of my kids.

Now that they are teenagers, their reactions are a bit more subdued, but they still manage to communicate their love. One thing I've noticed over the years is that their verbal expressions of love are almost always accompanied by a natural and spontaneous physical expression. Why is that so important? Well today we're going to be talking about the physical ways we, as God's children, express our love for him in worship.

If you're joining us for the first time, we're in the middle of a sermon series called the Experiential Worshipper. Our theme verse for this series is: **"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength."** This verse is Jesus' recipe for a healthy and balanced worship life. Last week we looked at the role of the heart and discovered how important our will, or our choices are in worship. And as you will see today, one of the most important choices we can make in worship is to engage our whole body.

Now this can be a hot topic because we all have different worship style preferences and opinions about what is appropriate or not. But I'd like to ask you this morning to put your preferences and opinions aside for a moment. One thing we all agree on is that worship is all about honoring God, so let's seek God's opinion and then use our "will" to follow His lead.

So we're going to spend most of our time in the Bible this morning. To get a better idea of how God wants us to worship him, we need to start with the creation story. As we all know, God created the water, earth, plants trees, birds, fish and animals. Then he created man and woman and gave them dominion over all of creation. In the last verse of *Genesis, chapter 1* we read: **"God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good."**

Have you ever stopped to ask why God created human beings? Why he didn't just stop with the animals? Well, in *Isaiah 43:6-7* God says: **"Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth – everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."** What were we created for? God's glory – to reflect God's glory. And that makes sense because we were created in His image. So God's desire from the beginning was that we would physically reflect His image and bring honor and glory to His name. We were created to worship God with our bodies.

So when Adam and Eve chose not to obey God, and ate from the forbidden tree, the consequences were physical consequences – backbreaking labor, and pain in childbirth. As a result, God’s people no longer fully reflected God’s glory.

But God did not give up on the physical world he created. Instead, he began the process of redeeming it. He did this by making covenants with his people. And he used physical elements as a sign of his promises: the rainbow with Noah, circumcision with Abraham, tablets of stone with Moses, animal sacrifices with Aaron.

Unfortunately, God’s people were stubborn and wayward and didn’t always live within the boundaries of these covenants, even with the physical signs. So He went one step farther. God didn’t just tell us about himself, he showed himself to us. *John 1: “**And the Word was God...the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.**”* God Himself physically entered creation the way all human beings enter creation, as a baby born of a woman!

And that baby grew into a man whose whole mission and ministry was spent touching the hurting and healing the sick. He demonstrated his deep concern for the physical well being of the people he encountered. And when Jesus’ physical body was nailed to the cross and raised from the dead, God’s great plan to redeem His people was complete.

Then Jesus sent his Spirit to live in us suddenly our bodies became sacred. As Paul says in *1 Corinthians 6:19: “**Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?**”* So if we believe in Jesus, our bodies are a miniature temple of the Holy Spirit. And if our bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit, then they are meant to be an instrument of praise and worship to God.

So as Bob Rognien, the author of The Experiential Worshiper series says, *“The more we learn to use our body to worship God, the more fully we will experience God.”* The more fully we experience God, the more fully we will be able to reflect His glory!

Biblical worship has always been a whole-body experience. Both the primary Hebrew and Greek words for worship literally mean to fall down prostrate before someone. Songwriter and worship leader Matt Redman, in his book Face Down, says, **“When we face up to the glory of God we soon find ourselves face down in worship.”** That certainly was happened to the people in the Bible who encountered God.

For example, when the Lord appeared to Abram to confirm his covenant, Abram “fell facedown”. (*Genesis 17:3*)

When Moses went up to the mountain to receive the tablets of stone he laid prostrate before God for forty days and nights (*Deut 9:9-12*)

When Ezekiel interceded on behalf of his people, he threw himself facedown and cried out to God. (*Ezekiel 11:13*)

When Peter, James and John heard God's voice during Jesus' transfiguration, they fell facedown to the ground. (*Matthew 17:6*)

In each example worship was a whole body experience.

The Book of Psalms is often referred to as a worship book, because it is a collection of prayers and songs that worship God. In it, the psalmists invite us to worship God with our bodies in a variety of ways:

Psalm 47:1: "Clap your hands all you peoples; shout to God with loud songs of joy."

Psalm 149:3: "O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!"

Psalm 150:4: "Praise him with the tambourine and dancing."

All of us have used our ears to experience God in worship. We listen to scripture, sermons, prayers and music. And most of us use our vocal chords as an instrument of worship. We sing praises to God, we pray out loud, sing liturgies and recite creeds. But there is much more to our bodies than our ears and vocal chords. So obviously, there is much more with our bodies in worship.

Now the name of this sermon series is the what? The Experiential Worshipper, which indicates that we would be doing what with our worship? Experimenting! So I'd like to ask you to take a small step out of your comfort zones this morning and try something with me. I promise I won't make you do anything too crazy. So let's all stand up.

Ok, the first thing I want you to do is look up at the ceiling. Notice how it opens you up more and turns your attention upward. Now imagine yourself like a chalice open and ready to receive the love and grace that God is pouring into you. Feels pretty good doesn't it?

Now try placing your hands on your heart. Now think for a minute about what it means to trust God with your whole heart. Isn't it interesting how much more powerful the idea is when what you are thinking about is accompanied by an action?

One more. First, I want you to say the first line of the Apostle's Creed out loud with me. **"We believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth."** Now, grab the hands of the people next to you and say it again: "We believe in God the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth." Quite a difference between the two isn't there? Ok, you can sit back down.

Remember when I shared how the pure, unadulterated love Christina and Caitlyn would show me when I came home from a trip? Remember how it always had a physical expression along with the verbal? The question this morning is, as God's children, how do we express our pure, unadulterated love for Him? What is a natural way we can use our "temples" to practice strength worship?

We have an opportunity for you to practice strength worship at home this week with your prayers. The card in your bulletin encourages you to try praying in different positions, kneeling, standing with arms raised up, and even prostrate on the floor. I encourage you to experiment and see what God does as you worship him in strength.

Let's pray.